[Translation]

For You the Newcomer

A Simple and Ordinary Essay on Dhamma

"Santinun"

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PREFACE

“Mindfulness of mind” is a wording that a few years ago sounded strange, but now is very popular and widely used, particularly in the groups of people who are interested in practicing Dhamma. This is because mindfulness of mind is suitable to urban society where most people have to think a lot at work. It is also very conducive to practice in everyday life.

However, the beginners who are interested in mindfulness of mind have come up with problems: how to begin, what the mind is, what is required and how to practice mindfulness, etc. These problems have become the frequently asked questions of the beginners.

Therefore, we have requested permission from Venerable Phra Pramote Pamojjo to publish these Articles, “For You the Newcomer” and “A Brief Guideline for Practicing Dhamma” for free distribution to people who are interested in practicing Dhamma by mindfulness of mind so that this book will clear their doubts and provide them with the basis for further practice.

Meanwhile, these two articles were written under the pen name “Santinun” since he was still a layman and were shared among the Dhamma relatives who were his acquaintances. Therefore, the language and the style used might be somewhat different from his recent books.

We are very grateful to Venerable Phra Pramote Pamojjo for his kind permission for this publication for distribution as a gift of Dhamma.

The Publishers

For You the Newcomer:

A Simple and Ordinary Essay on Dhamma

It is difficult for us to see that Dhamma (the Teachings of the Buddha) is simple and ordinary. This is because the ways that we perceive Buddhism and Dhamma are often less than ordinary. To begin with, the language used in Dhamma teachings is full of *Pali* words and contains a multitude of technical terminology. Therefore, understanding these terms alone is a challenge to everyone.

Once we are familiarized with the terms, there is another obstacle, in that there are many volumes of the Buddha's teachings and an overabundance of interpretations by his disciples. In addition, when someone wants to begin practicing, he will be faced with yet another challenge: there are many meditation centers and most of them suggest that their teaching methods most accurately reflect the Buddha's teachings on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipaṭṭhanā*). Some places even accuse others of deviating from the actual teachings.

We have all faced these difficulties. And they are what led me to question myself as to whether it is possible to study Dhamma in a more simple way: without learning *Pali*, without reading books and without having to join a meditation center.

Actually Dhamma as taught by the Buddha is quite easy and simple, as his disciples exclaimed, "It is so explicitly clear my Lord! Your sermon is like turning an inverted object right side up." This should not come as a surprise because we are all born with Dhamma, live with Dhamma, and will all die with Dhamma. We just don't realize where Dhamma is until it is revealed to us through the teachings of the Buddha, which provide us with a simple path to follow.

Another point to note is just how wise the Buddha truly was. He could make the most complicated topic simple and easy to comprehend. He had the ability to convey the essence of the Dhamma in a way which was most suitable for his listeners. And language was no obstacle, as he was able to communicate clearly without relying on complicated terminology. On the contrary, many people who have studied and taught Dhamma in future generations have turned Dhamma into something complicated, out of reach, and not easily applicable as a tool to end suffering. Even the language used in their teachings is difficult for any ordinary person to understand.

The truth is that Dhamma is extremely close to us. It is so close, that we can say it is about ourselves. The Dhamma's aim is simple - how to be free from suffering.

When we study Dhamma, we should look directly into "where suffering is, how suffering arises and how to end suffering." To be successful in the study of Dhamma means to practice until reaching the end of suffering, not about the amount of knowledge acquired or the ability to explain Dhamma beautifully!

The truth is that the suffering we experience lies within our body and mind. The field of study for Dhamma is actually inside of us. Instead of looking to the outside world for learning, we may look inwardly at our own selves. The method is simple: just to observe our body and mind closely. We can start by simply observing our physical body.

The first step is to relax. There is no need to be tense or to think about practicing Dhamma. We just observe our own body. It does not matter how much we can notice, we just observe as much as we can.

Once at ease, we can be aware of the whole body. We watch it as we might watch a robot… walking, moving, chewing, swallowing food (adding some material thing to the body), and excreting waste.

If we can watch as neutral observers as this robot-body which we call "ours" performs its tasks, we will eventually see that the body is not really ours and moves of its own accord. It is only a material object, which never stands still and never stays fixed. Even the components of this robot change constantly, with substances moving in and out all the time, such as breathing in and breathing out and consuming food and drinks and excreting waste. Thus, the body is just a group of elements (earth, wind, fire and water) which are not permanent. By simply observing the body, our clinging to the wrong view that the body is "ours" will eventually fade. Then, we will see that there is some other nature (that we call mind), which knows this body and which resides within it.

Once we can see that this body is just a group of constantly changing elements and does not belong to us, why don't we try to observe that thing which is hidden inside our physical body. In this way, we can learn about ourselves more deeply and in greater detail.

That thing which is hidden inside of us can easily be seen. It is the feelings of happiness, unhappiness and neutrality. For example, as we observe this robot-body moving around, soon we will see aching, pain, thirst, hunger and some other discomforts arising from time to time. However, once the unhappy feelings pass, we will again feel happy for a time (happiness arising). For example, when we are thirsty and feeling unhappy, we drink some water and the unhappiness caused by the thirst is gone. Or if we are sitting for a long time and begin to ache, we feel unhappy. Once we adjust the body position, the discomfort goes away and the unhappiness disappears with it (happiness arising).

Sometimes when we are ill, we can be aware of physical suffering continuously for a longer period of time. For example, when we have a toothache for several days, if we closely monitor the pain, we will discover that the discomfort arises from somewhere between the tooth and the gum. However, these objects (tooth and gum) themselves don't produce the pain. The body is like a robot which does not feel pain and suffering, yet the discomfort resides inside the body.

We will see that these feelings of happiness, unhappiness and neutrality are not part of the body, but something that can be felt and observed within the body, just like the body itself.

From there, we can study ourselves in greater detail. We can closely observe that when physical suffering arises, it is our mind which reacts negatively. For example, when we are hungry, we get upset more easily, when we are tired, we get angry more easily, when we have fever, we get agitated more easily, or when our desires are not met, we get irritated more easily. We can be aware of the anger that arises when faced with physical suffering.

On the other hand, when we see beautiful sights, hear pleasing sounds, smell pleasant fragrances, taste delicious flavors, feel a soft touch or a comfortable temperature - not too hot and not too cold - or think pleasant thoughts, we will feel liking and satisfaction with such sights, sounds, fragrances, tastes, touches and thoughts. Once we are aware of pleasant and unpleasant feelings as they arise, we can similarly become aware of other feelings such as doubtfulness, vengeance, depression, jealousy, disdain, cheerfulness and tranquility of mind, as well.

When we study these feelings further, we will begin to realize that they themselves are not stable. For example, when we are angry and become conscious of the anger, we can detect the constant change in the intensity of this anger. Eventually, it will fade and disappear. Whether or not the feeling of anger disappears, what is important is that the anger is seen as an object to be observed, not belonging to us. There is no "us" in the anger. We can observe other feelings with this same understanding.

At this point we can see that our body is like a robot. And, the feelings of happiness, unhappiness and all others are just objects to be observed and do not belong to us. The more we understand about the process of our minds, the more evident is the truth that suffering only arises when there is a cause.

We will find that there is a natural impulse, or force within our mind. For example, when we see a beautiful woman, our mind will start to develop a liking toward her. This creates a compelling force toward that woman. Our mind will in turn move towards that woman, seeing only that woman, and we forget about ourselves.

(Regarding the subject of the mind wandering, a person who has only studied from textbooks may feel puzzled. However, if a person really gets into practice, he/she will see just how far the mind can wander, just as described word-for-word by the Buddha himself.)

Or when we have doubtful thoughts about how to practice Dhamma, we will see that we have the urge to find an answer. Our mind will then wander into the world of thoughts. This is when we forget about ourselves. The robot-body is still here, but we forget about it, as if it has disappeared from this world. There may be other emotions inside as well; however, we might not be aware of them because our mind is busy searching for answers to the doubtful thoughts.

If we observe ourselves more and more, we will soon understand how suffering occurs, how to be free from suffering, and how it feels to be without suffering. Our mind will rectify itself without having to think about meditation, wisdom, or the path that leads to the end of suffering.

We may not be well-versed in Dhamma or *Pali* words, but our minds can still be free from suffering. And, even though we still experience suffering, it will be less intense and for a shorter period of time.

I wrote this essay as a small gift for all those who are interested in practicing Dhamma in order to convey that: Dhamma is ordinary, it is about ourselves, and can be learned by ourselves without much difficulty. So do not feel discouraged when you hear people who are well-versed in Dhamma talking about theory. In reality, you do not need to know anything except for how to be free from suffering, because this is the heart of Buddhism, which is the most important thing for one to learn.

"A Brief Guideline for Practicing Dhamma"

Many of my friends have come to practice Dhamma with me and I have seen problems that have arisen among them at a later time. Some are afraid that they will not be able to practice Dhamma correctly if they are not with me. The Bangkok folks are more at ease because they know where to find me; however, my friends from abroad and in the upcountry are more concerned because of the distance. They asked for a brief guideline with clear instructions on how to practice Dhamma correctly so that when I am not around, they can still practice with confidence.

Some would listen to my talks, but got confused or did not understand well. Some would apply my answers to other's questions to themselves, which were often appropriate for a different stage of practice and not suitable for that individual. The result of applying the answer to another's question to oneself is no different from taking another patient's medication. I have therefore been requested to put together all of my talks on practicing Dhamma in order to clarify any misunderstandings.

The other problem that I know of is that some of my friends have argued amongst themselves by quoting my suggestions which were used on different occasions or at different times, thus resulting in disagreement.

Therefore, I feel that there is a need for a brief Dhamma guideline to summarize the practice that I have suggested to my colleagues and friends. This is to clearly show the whole picture of Dhamma practice from the beginning onward, in order to avoid the above-mentioned problems.

1. To Understand the Scope of Buddhism

Friends who have little background in Buddhism need to know that Buddhism is not a medicine that cures all illnesses in the universe. It is not the only tool necessary to survive in society. Therefore if you are a college student, you do not need to quit college just to study Buddhism, because worldly knowledge is essential for everyone to lead a

normal life in this world. A student of Buddhism needs to be well-rounded in other fields of study as well. Do not misunderstand that Buddhism is the study of something other than suffering and how to be free from suffering (mental). Buddhism is not limited to giving answers to questions relating to superstition, fate, past lives, future lives, ghosts, angels, etc.

2. Tools for Practicing Dhamma

Those who already know the Buddhist teachings on suffering and how to end suffering have already been introduced to the tools for practicing Dhamma, which are mindfulness and clear comprehension (*sati-sampajañña*).

My advice for us is to be aware of the feelings that are happening in our mind. Some examples are feelings of doubt, greed, worry, happiness, and sadness. This is the practice of being mindful, which is the tool to be aware of the objects of consciousness that arise.

We are all encouraged to remember to be aware and not to get lost in the six sense doors, namely the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. It is most common for us to get lost through the eye door or the mind door. Getting lost in the mind door, for example, means losing ourselves in the world of thoughts or over-focusing on a mind-object which is present. By consistently being aware, not getting lost in objects of consciousness or over-focusing, we achieve clear comprehension, or clear consciousness (*sampajañña*).

3. Foundations of Mindfulness

Once we have the tools, or weapons for practicing Dhamma, the next subject I would like to introduce to us all is the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipaṭṭhanā*). This means practicing mindfulness and having clear comprehension of the body, feelings, mind, and/or mind-objects (*Dhamma*), depending on each individual's natural tendencies. Some examples are mindfulness of bodily movement when doing walking meditation or when breathing in and breathing out. In the beginning, before mindfulness has been developed, one can do the concentration practice (*samatha*), which means bringing your attention to the body as the object - in a relaxed way. When the mind gets more developed, let us observe that bodily movement and movement of the air when breathing in and out are just objects to be seen. This is impermanence, suffering, and non-self right in front of our eyes.

Once we can do that, the mind gains strength through mindfulness and clear comprehension. Now, whenever mental factors appear, the mind will automatically detect them. For example, when happiness, sadness, wholesome and unwholesome states enter the mind, all of these mental factors are observed, just like any bodily object.

Once one is proficient at observing the mental factors, I would suggest that he/she continues practicing by observing these mental factors. For those who are not accustomed to observing the mental factors, the suggestion is to be mindful of bodily objects.

Once the mind observes the mental and bodily objects continuously, it gains more mindfulness (*sati*) and wisdom (*paññā*). When observing mental and bodily factors, the mind will naturally react to these objects with a pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feeling tone. I often suggest to my friends and colleagues to be aware of these feelings of pleasant, unpleasant and neutral. With awareness, we will see the pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feelings arise and pass away just like all the other mental and bodily objects which we have been observing. The mind will then let go of these feelings and equanimity can arise. When the mind first enters into the state of equanimity, we might only experience this evenness of mind for a short time. Once the mind is more skillful, it will experience the state of equanimity increasingly more often and the practitioner will become aware of the equanimity itself. When the mind gains this sort of strength, it will be able to distinguish the Five Aggregates (*khandha*) in greater detail.

At the stage when we are aware of the equanimity, many intellectuals are faced with two complications:

1. Boredom arises and one stops the practice.
2. Doubt about what to do next arises, and again one stops the practice of being aware and instead searches for answers to the doubts by using the thinking process.

Actually once the mind becomes aware of the equanimity, all one has to do is continue to be aware. When the strength of mindfulness (*sati*), mental stability (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*) are fully mature, the mind will then develop on its own.

Thus, this concludes a brief guideline for practicing Dhamma which I would like to present to my friends and colleagues for future discussion.

4. The Incorrect Methods of Mindfulness Practice

Even using the above guideline, when people start to practice Dhamma, they are often faced with many different problems, mainly from incorrect mindfulness practice.

For many of us, the more we practice, the more we divert from the goal. The main mistake is, instead of being mindful of things as they are happening, we tend to create a new object of consciousness and then get stuck in it.

This mistake can occur when one thinks that his/her mind is too distracted and therefore thinks it would be best to do concentration practice (*samatha*) first. Then, one begins to practice *samatha* incorrectly, which means instead of developing right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*), one develops wrong concentration (*micchā-samādhi*). This wrong type of concentration is not concerned about awareness, but instead just focuses on one object, letting the mind get into the object and attach to it instead of **being aware of the object in a relaxed way, without getting lost, and without over-focusing**. The mind should simply be mindful of an object with comfort and one-pointedness.

With wrong concentration, the mind gets attached to the object that it has created. When we stop doing the concentration practice and return to observe the mind or practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, we bring the mind which is now attached to an object to

observe the mind. This kind of mind can not be used to develop the Four Foundations of Mindfulness because the mind itself is stuck in the object, and can no longer see the truth.

Another common mistake is that, instead of being aware of whatever is arising in a simple, easy and relaxed way, many people become afraid to get lost (i.e. lost in thinking), especially when they are about to see me or around me. Thus their minds become too alert, tense and on-guard. This feeling is no different from a runner at the starting line.

Yet another hindrance is practicing Dhamma with craving, or desire. An example of this is when a person wants to be enlightened quickly, wants to be smart and outstanding or wants praise and acceptance from friends. The more one wants to excel, the more he/she tries to **"accelerate the effort"** instead of allowing mindfulness and clear comprehension (*sati-sampajañña*) to develop consistently and naturally over time. (Actually, to develop mindfulness and clear comprehension consistently and naturally over time is the correct meaning of accelerated effort.) When one practices with craving, the practice is very tense. Though it may look like it's going well from the outside, the inner self is neither happy nor peaceful.

These three common mistakes cause many of us to get lost in attachment to one object and mistakenly believe that we are fully aware, but actually this is not really mindfulness. Once we become aware of the mind which has created a mental experience then we can get free from this state of mind and truly be mindful of what is happening in the moment.

There is a funny story of a young man whose mind was stuck in a mental object. I suggested that he just observe and be aware that his mind is attached to the object. And that once aware of the attachment, the mind will come out instead of leaning into the object. This young man was very troubled by this suggestion, as he thought that when I said "come out," I was teaching him to let the mind wander freely. Fortunately, he came back to discuss the misunderstanding with me; otherwise, had he mentioned this to the senior monks, I might have been kicked out of the temple!

Actually, when a person unknowingly creates a mental object and gets stuck in it, this is in fact what is meant by 'wandering mind', which is something other than being aware. I had tried to help the young man to see that what he was doing by over-focusing was letting the mind wander. I never intended for him to intentionally let the mind wander freely.

Another problem that some of us face is getting lost in the mental objects; for example, getting lost in *nimitta* (mental image) of light, color, sound or even bodily jerks. When this condition arises, some people experience it as pleasant and others experience it as unpleasant. I guide them to observe the pleasant and unpleasant feelings until the mind becomes neutral instead of over-focusing on those mental objects which are already tainted by liking (*rāga*), disliking (*dosa*) or delusion (*moha*).

To avoid mistakes in practicing Dhamma, we must adhere closely to these principles: "Be aware of the defilements (*kilesa-taṇhā*) which try to overcome our mind. Practice until our mind gains wisdom (*paññā*) and becomes free from the power of the defilements (*kilesa-taṇhā*)." We do not practice Dhamma for anything other than these things. If we practice Dhamma to satisfy our desire to know, desire to see, desire to become something, desire

to get something, desire to stand out, desire to be famous or even our desire to attain enlightenment, the possibility for getting off track is greater. This is because the mind tends to create a new set of conditions instead of simply being aware of everything just as it is.

We need to be observant of ourselves. If we start to feel that our mind is weightier than its surroundings, this means that the mind has already gotten lost in attachment to, or identification with something. The natural state of the mind should not have any weight at all. It should be neutral to its surroundings. If the mind feels weighty, it is because we are carrying something extra. At that moment, try to relax the mind and simply notice your surroundings. For example, consider buildings, tables, chairs, and trees; all of these elements have no weight on the mind because we do not carry them. When we look inwardly, we will see that our mind is sometimes more or less weighty. It is this weightiness which causes our mind to appear to be separate from nature. That which separates (the mind from nature) is extra, created by our minds when we are not aware of the defilements (*kilesa*).

Once we know how to practice, we continue to observe our mind. Is there any pleasant or unpleasant reaction toward the objects which enter the mind? We continue to observe until the mind is impartial to all objects, until the inner and outer nature are equally weighty, until eventually there is no more weight to carry.

Lord Buddha taught that the Five Aggregates (*khandha*) are heavy. Anyone carrying this weight will never find happiness. His teaching is the absolute truth. The Five Aggregates are truly heavy for those who have the eyes to see clearly.

The Buddha has taught us that birth, ageing, illness and death are suffering.
Only few who hear this Dhamma can really understand.
Most understand that our birth, ageing, illness and death are suffering.
No one ever understands that in reality
the condition of birth, the condition of ageing,
the condition of illness and the condition of death themselves are suffering.
There is no self that suffers.
There are only conditions of matter and mind that show
the Three Characteristics: arising, persisting and disappearing.
They are uncontrollable and are not under anyone's command.

When we misunderstand and misbelieve that
matter and mind/body and mind are self,
when matter and mind age, fall sick or die, we struggle to escape.
The more we struggle, the more we suffer.
The more we suffer, the more we struggle,
instead of realizing the truth that suffering exists,
but no sufferer is there.
When we practice Dhamma until we can only see the pure condition,
which is devoid of animals, persons, self and others,
we will understand the Four Noble Truths thoroughly.
From previously that we simply perceived that
***samudaya* or *taṇhā* (craving) caused suffering,**
we will comprehend clearly
that our ignorance of suffering or matter and mind
as we have misunderstood that they are us
causes *taṇhā,* which is a desire
to make ourselves free from suffering and happy.
It is this *taṇhā* that causes double mental suffering.
How deep and subtle these Noble Truths are!
As all beings do not understand the Noble Truths,
they have to wander endlessly in the rounds of rebirth.

But if they thoroughly comprehend *dukkha* (suffering),
***Samudaya* will be automatically abandoned.**
Then, *nirodha* will flash right before their very eyes.
Comprehension of *dukkha* until *samudaya* is abandoned
and *nirodha* realized is the Noble Path,
the only path leading to the extinction of suffering.

Whenever we see that it is purely a state
that arises, persists and disappears,
that it is suffering, not-self and uncontrollable,
we will be aware with equanimity,
will know and will see with equanimity.
There is no more craving in that state again.
(A state is awareness. There is no thought in that state.)

Phra Pramote Promojjo